

Mayor Virg Bernero 2007 State of the City Address

"Lansing On The Move"

ACD.net Metro Internet Exchange January 29, 2007

Welcome and good evening. President Leeman, Councilmembers, honored guests, citizens of Lansing; it is my pleasure to present to you my 2007 State of the City Address.

I am delighted that all of you could join me here tonight at the Metro Internet Exchange, the new headquarters of ACD.net, one of the terrific technology companies that now calls Lansing home. My thanks to CEO Kevin Schoen and the entire ACD.net team for allowing us the privilege of being here tonight.

I am proud to introduce Lansing's First Lady, the love of my life, Teri Bernero, and our daughters, Virginia and Kelly. Thank you for being with me tonight — and always.

And I want to welcome the newest member of the Lansing City Council, Derrick Quinney, who was appointed earlier tonight to the seat formerly held by our new State Representative, Joan Bauer. Derrick and Joan, congratulations on your new positions.

I look forward to working with both of you, and with all of my Council colleagues, in the years ahead. Will you all please stand and be recognized.

One year ago, in my first State of the City Address, I called on the people of Lansing to believe in our City, to join me in helping Lansing become one of the great Midwestern capital cities.

Tonight I am pleased to report that we've made significant progress in this quest. The state of our City is good — and gaining momentum.

Lansing is on the move!

The progress we've made in one year would have been impossible without an all-star team. Will the members of my Staff, Cabinet and city employees who are here tonight please stand and be recognized.

There can be no doubt that Lansing is on the move. The evidence is clear:

The U.S. Department of Labor recently reported that only one metropolitan area in the entire state posted job gains last year.

It wasn't Ann Arbor. It wasn't Grand Rapids.

It was Lansing, Michigan.

Our unemployment rate remains well below the state average and both job creation and private investment are up — way up.

In the last 12 months, under the able direction of Bob Trezise — our own Wizard of Jobs — Lansing posted a 300% increase in new investment and job creation. In my first year as Mayor, investment increased from \$50 million to more than \$220 million, and from 500 new jobs to more than 2,000 new jobs.

We accomplished a great deal together in 2006, but we still face significant challenges.

When it comes to tackling the City's structural budget deficit, we can't seem to shake old habits. For the last 4 years, Lansing has spent more than we've taken in. Year after year, instead of making the hard choices, we've drained our financial reserves to a dangerously low level. Further raids on our rainy day funds would be irresponsible and wrong. To avoid much deeper financial trouble, we must put an end to this practice now.

The bottom line: We must leave the false promise of quick fixes and easy answers to those with low expectations for our city's future. Together we must sharpen our pencils, prioritize programs and tighten our belts.

Despite our budget challenges, Lansing is making positive progress and gaining momentum every day.

The revitalization of our downtown is nothing short of amazing. Old office buildings are being transformed into new lofts and apartments that fill up as soon as they are completed — proof positive that the downtown housing market is ripe for new growth.

Washington Square is filled night and day with people discovering the new energy and excitement in the heart of our city. New businesses are opening their doors to tap into a growing customer base of new downtown residents, visitors and thousands of Cooley Law students. For the first time in years, downtown Lansing is "alive after 5."

Our new "Entertainment Express" trolley has connected downtown Lansing and East Lansing, shortening the distance between the two greatest economic engines of mid-Michigan: the State Capitol and MSU. Special thanks to East Lansing Mayor Sam Singh, Sandy Dragoo, Lee Hladki, and Eric "The Conductor" Hart for helping to get the trolley rolling.

The gateway to our State Capitol, Michigan Avenue, is poised to become "Michigan's Avenue." The rebirth of our principal corridor began a decade ago under the leadership and vision of Mayor David Hollister, who built Oldsmobile Park and sparked a new wave of positive development.

Mayor Hollister is here with us tonight. David, thank you for your contributions to our City.

Today, a new wave of revitalization is upon us. Directly across from the ballpark, construction is underway on a new cornerstone development. The Stadium District — comprising an entire city block — promises to enhance downtown offerings for residents and visitors alike.

Our City is attracting a new generation of entrepreneurs — young, ambitious visionaries who believe in Lansing's tremendous potential. Trailblazing investors like Harry Hepler, Kris and Sean Elliott, Richard Karp, Pat Gillespie, Gene Townsend and others are helping to make downtown Lansing, Michigan's downtown.

In the year ahead we will continue to pursue new developments that promise to transform the landscape of downtown Lansing, including a new Performing Arts Center and redevelopment of the Ottawa Power Station on our riverfront.

And I am pleased to announce tonight a new partnership between two of the most important assets in our downtown — the Capital Area District Library and the Impression 5 Science Museum.

Our shared vision is to combine these two institutions by building a brand new, world-class library and children's museum in the heart of our downtown. This state-of-the-art facility will help ensure that Michigan families will visit downtown Lansing again and again, long after the State Capitol school tours end.

We are changing the face of downtown Lansing. Our downtown is becoming the hub of the wheel instead of the hole in the donut. If you haven't been to downtown Lansing lately, you haven't been to downtown Lansing at all.

Let no one doubt: Lansing is on the move!

A great city not only has a great downtown, it has great neighborhoods, safe and clean, with a variety of quality housing options.

As promised, we've launched a major drive to clean up the aging stock of red-tagged houses that accumulated over many years. Our new Neighborhood Enhancement Action Team, or NEAT, is cracking down on absentee landlords who refuse to bring their properties up to code.

Two absentee landlords were even sent to jail for failing to comply with court-ordered improvements to their properties. With the assistance of City Attorney Brigham Smith, NEAT is turning up the heat on landlords who allow their properties to diminish our neighborhoods.

In partnership with the Lansing Housing Commission, we will soon develop Lansing's newest neighborhood on the former School for the Blind campus. A mix of affordable senior housing and market-rate, owner-occupied homes, the redevelopment of this beautiful property will uplift the surrounding area and help young families realize the American dream of home ownership.

Last year we launched a new Community Policing Initiative, assigning a full-time Community Resource Officer to each of our four public high schools. Already the program is paying huge dividends by helping to create a positive environment for learning in our schools.

Last week I announced our next step forward with the assignment of four new Community Police Officers to specific neighborhoods across our city. The streets of Lansing belong to our citizens and I am absolutely committed to keeping it that way.

While we rev up Lansing's downtown and improve the quality of life in our neighborhoods, we must also look beyond the borders of our city and adopt a regional perspective.

Tonight I want to say thank you to the voters of Ingham County for voting overwhelmingly to approve the new regional millage supporting Potter Park Zoo. Securing the future of this crown jewel of our park system was an historic moment, and a major step forward in thinking and acting as one region.

The County Board of Commissioners and our City Council are to be commended for acting promptly to put this question before the voters. In particular, I want to recognize the courageous and tenacious leadership of Commissioner Victor Celentino and Zoo Task Force Chairperson Rebecca Bahar-Cook. Will all of the county commissioners who are with us tonight please rise and be recognized. Thank you for your bold leadership.

Two weeks ago we announced another major LEAP forward in regional cooperation, the Lansing Economic Area Partnership. For the first time, LEAP brings together the leaders of business, industry and regional governments to chart a new path to prosperity. Rather than competing against one another for jobs and economic growth, regional leaders are working together as never before to leverage our assets, to plan together and to create the prosperity we all seek.

The private sector leaders of this new initiative are Accident Fund CEO Elizabeth Haar, Joe Reid of Capital Bancorp, Steve Alexander of National City Bank and Jack Davis of the Loomis Law Firm.

Our regional partners in LEAP include Mayor Sam Singh of East Lansing and Supervisor Joe Drolett of Delta Township. Jack Davis and Supervisor Drolett are here with us tonight. Will you please rise and be recognized.

While we work together to grow the Lansing region, it is a moral and financial imperative that we transform our community into a model of energy efficiency and environmental responsibility. We cannot and will not fail our children and grandchildren, who may rightfully ask: what did we do to protect their air, their water and their future.

Therefore we will act — as Lansing has never acted before — to become a leader in energy conservation and environmental protection.

Later this week, I will join hundreds of mayors from across the nation in signing the U.S. Mayor's Climate Protection Agreement, committing our City to significant reductions in greenhouse gas emissions that contribute to global warming.

In addition, we will become the second city in the nation to accept the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's Energy Star Challenge. You may recognize this logo — it appears on many new appliances and home electronics.

The Energy Star Challenge calls for a 10% improvement in the energy efficiency of city-owned buildings. Tonight, I call upon all Lansing residents and businesses to join city government in meeting this Challenge.

I will sign an Executive Order that requires city government to adopt new energy standards and practices to improve our environment at the same time we save money.

Under this order we will adopt an aggressive Renewable Portfolio Standard, or RPS, that requires city government to use renewable energy for 10% of our total consumption by 2010 and 20% by 2020.

We will switch our City's standard diesel fuel to B20 biodiesel, a cleaner fuel that will improve vehicle emissions and reduce maintenance costs.

We will adopt a new vehicle procurement policy that requires the City fleet to be powered by alternative energy. As we retire aging City vehicles, they will be replaced whenever possible with the latest generation of hybrid and E85 flex-fuel vehicles.

Tonight, please join me in welcoming the newest member of Lansing's green fleet — our first-ever electric utility vehicle.

As we retool for a new era of sustainable energy, we are also retooling the very foundation of our local economy.

We are fortunate to have a solid manufacturing base that is still growing. Demmer Corporation is adding 300 manufacturing jobs and our Tool and Die industry recently won a new Renaissance Zone designation from the Michigan Strategic Fund.

Lansing remains a global leader in the automobile industry, thanks to GM's rock-solid commitment to our region. I am the product of a GM-UAW family, and I'm proud to say that Lansing is still a GM town.

Sensational new GM products were a smash hit at the International Auto Show earlier this month. GM swept the Car and Truck of the Year awards and unveiled the Chevy Volt electric hybrid — a thrilling preview of GM's future.

The best of the new GM vehicles — the cream of the crop — are the Lansing-built cars, including the new Cadillac CTS, Saturn Outlook, Buick Enclave and GMC Acadia.

Tonight we are joined by some of the people who build these incredible new vehicles. Please welcome Grand River Assistant Plant Manager Betty Romsek, Lansing Delta Township Assistant Plant Manager Geoff Weller, UAW Local Presidents Tiny Sherwood and Doug Rademacher, and some of Lansing's finest automotive workers. Ladies and gentlemen, will you please stand and be recognized for helping to put Lansing on the map.

With such great products, built by such talented people, we can compete anywhere in the world!

Even as we celebrate our manufacturing prowess, we must strive to diversify our economy to create an even stronger foundation for future prosperity.

In the past year, we have retained and attracted numerous companies that are on the cutting edge of the new economy, creating high-wage jobs, strengthening our tax base and forging a new identity for Lansing as a high-tech powerhouse.

ACD.net, our host tonight, has created mid-Michigan's largest data center for secure storage of vital information for some of Michigan's largest companies, right here in Lansing.

Emergent Biosolutions is investing \$70 million and creating hundreds of new jobs, right here in Lansing.

Under the leadership of CEO Jim Herbert, Neogen is transforming old school buildings into powerful engines of job creation and neighborhood revitalization, right here in Lansing.

Niowave — it sounds like the name of a rollercoaster at Cedar Point. In fact it is one of the most technologically sophisticated companies in America today, building components for atomic particle accelerators, right here in Lansing.

And the list goes on. Arialink. IDV Solutions. Spartan Internet. AquaBioChip. Lectronix. Dewpoint.

The CEOs of many of these cutting edge companies are with us tonight and I ask them to please rise and be recognized. These are the folks who are sending the message far and wide: Lansing is on the move!

The jobs of the future require our workforce to be better educated than ever before. In this high-tech economy, jobs and companies will go where the talent is. We must maintain the best-trained workforce in the country and we must teach our children the critical skills and knowledge that are required to be a contender in the emerging information economy.

That's why I am launching the new Business-Education Science Technology Initiative. The BEST Initiative will help ensure training for our workers and prepare our students for the demands of tomorrow's workplace.

BEST will be a partnership of our leading educational institutions and the leaders of our new technology economy. I want to thank our partners at MSU, LCC, the Lansing School District, Michigan Works! and the Lansing technology community for agreeing to help me implement the BEST Initiative.

BEST will be co-chaired by Dr. Judith Cardenas, President of Lansing Community College, Dr. Hiram Fitzgerald, Associate Provost at MSU, and Andy Kotarba, President and CEO of Dewpoint. Will you please rise and be recognized.

When it comes to partnerships, there has been no better partner than Dr. Sharon Banks, who will retire this year as Superintendent of Lansing Schools. Dr. Banks, will you please join me at the podium.

Dr. Banks, you leave a legacy of leadership and accomplishment that will be long remembered. When you arrived in Lansing, 15 elementary schools were not making AYP — Annual Yearly Progress. Under your leadership, all 15 are now making AYP and your magnet schools and International Baccalaureate program have earned national attention. Sharon, thank you for believing in Lansing.

I am also proud to introduce Lansing's next Superintendent, Dr. T.C. Wallace, who begins his new position this summer. Dr. Wallace, will you please join me at the podium. I'm very impressed with your experience and commitment. And I'm confident that we will forge an excellent working relationship to help our schools and our city move forward together.

As we prepare our children for the challenges ahead, we must also become a community that retains the talented young people who graduate from our excellent institutions of higher learning. For them, a vibrant, exciting city is their preferred destination, after graduation.

Nowhere is our promise as a cool city more evident than in Old Town, the home of JazzFest, Bluesfest and Festival of the Sun. Old Town is also home to a creative class of artists and entrepreneurs who have transformed Lansing's original downtown into the cultural capital of mid-Michigan. I encourage you to venture to Old Town and find out why we call it the "capital of cool."

We have a lot to be proud of here in Lansing. We are an incredibly diverse community filled with amazingly talented people and I am more committed than ever to a city government that reflects that rich diversity.

I am proud tonight to say that our City Council and my Administration worked together to approve a new Human Rights Ordinance that protects the fundamental rights guaranteed to all of our citizens. I want to commend Councilmember Kathie Dunbar in particular for her leadership in getting the new ordinance on the books.

I started my Administration one year ago with a simple affirmation: I believe in Lansing.

Today, I believe in Lansing more than ever. I believe in our neighborhood activists. I believe in our business leaders. I believe in our regional officials. I believe in our Governor and, most of all, I believe in you.

The state of our city is linked directly to the state of you. We live in an age of personal empowerment. So much so that Time magazine's 2006 Person of the Year was you — each of you. The individual in today's society has more information and power at his and her fingertips than at any time in our history.

How will you use your power?

Lansing cannot reach its full potential unless each of our citizens reaches his or her own potential. Our success as a community is directly linked to the success of our brothers and sisters among us. We are stronger together. We sink or swim together.

But the real power — the real choice — is in your hands.

To achieve the greatness that I know resides in our community, each of us must choose to embrace change, rather than fear it. Each of us must choose to accept a certain measure of risk, rather than run from it. And each of us must choose to take a leap of faith, to believe that we can be better than we are today.

In his revolutionary book, Good to Great, Jim Collins describes how good can actually become the enemy of great, because good is always safe and acceptable.

Let me be clear — "good" is not good enough for the City of Lansing.

Together, we will move this City from good to great. We will become one of the great Midwestern capital cities.

My friends and colleagues — Lansing is on the move. Momentum is on our side.

And nothing can stop us now.

Thank you, good night and God bless you.